Desktop publishing can be difficult

One of the biggest shocks to would-be desktop publishers is that merely owning an expensive desktop publishing program does not make you a competent type and graphic designer — though it can foster an appreciation for those who are.

Nonetheless, if you are determined to make the plunge here are some preliminary steps you should take:

■ Subscribe to a magazine called Macworld. It is available from IDG Communications Inc., 501 Second St., San Francisco Calif. 94107 for $47.40 for 12 issues.

Not only is this magazine one of the best resources for Macintosh users, but it demonstrates every month a remarkable example of heavy-duty destktop publishing in action. The editorial commentary in the May issue details how this 300-page monthly converted from traditional magazine production to complete in-house desktop system for all editorial portions of the magazine.

BUSINESS TOOLS

Hillel Segal

■ Subscribe to Publishfrom PCW Communications Inc., at the same address as Macworld. It costs $39.90 for 12 issues.

For coverage of both the Apple and IBM worlds of desktop publishing in a single magazine, this monthly provides the basics for both novices and advanced users.

■ Buy the book: WordPerfect 5 Desktop Publishing in Style by Daniel Will-Harris, Peachpit Press, Berkeley, Calif., for $21.95. This book is an example of how a computer book can be fun and informative at the same time.

Before you plunk down a half grand on a full-blown DTP program, check out what a program like WordPerfect can do if you "pull out its stops." You can get in-

to some pretty fancy page layouts with a laser printer and such features as styles, macros and graphics. The book is chock full of examples and step-by-step procedures.

■ Which brings us to the question: To desktop publish or not to desktop publish? My general advice for most users is to first try your familiar word processor program. In most instances it makes more sense to stay in one comfortable program that has full text features, than to bounce back and forth with a layout program that is harder to use.

Also, the full-blown desktop publishing programs — most notably Ventura Publisher and Pagemaker — are much more difficult to learn and use than popular word processing programs. Many of the top-end word processing programs now have good previews, the ability to manipulate graphics files and intelligent font handling.

On the downside, the whole activity is rarely cost-effective in the short run. First, you'll need to ac-

quire hardware. Full-featured desktop publishing programs should run on a minimum of an AT class PC or a SE Macintosh, preferably with several megabytes of memory and a large hard disk. A laser printer, again with above normal memory, is also essential. And then there are the incidentals of adding a mouse, scanner, font libraries and possibly a high-resolution monitor.

■ The Bottom Line: Don't take the plunge without a lot of research first. If the hardware cost doesn't scare you, then consider the enormous amount of time and energy necessary to get up and running. You'll soon see that desktop publishing is not a frivolous undertaking. For most businesses the use of outside graphic arts services looks much more attractive.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity.